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RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 4429
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8326
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5554
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2780
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2961
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4842
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5414
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0022
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LA PAZ 002500

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SUBJECT: BOLIVIA ANNOUNCES FORMAL TIES WITH IRAN

REF: LA PAZ 2456

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca dropped the other shoe September 11 after both he and President Evo Morales hinted at pursuing formal diplomatic relations with Iran the previous week (reftel). Choquehuanca announced diplomatic relations with Iran at the end of a press conference regarding new, stricter visa requirements for U.S. citizens. Opposition Senator Tito Hoz de Vila, President of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, explained to the Ambassador that Evo's inner circle is looking to Iran in much the same way it used to look at Libya, before Libya decided to end its nuclear program. That is, as a way to stand up to the "empire," as President Morales refers to the United States. The Director of Multilateral Affairs told poloff that career staff in the Bolivian Foreign Ministry appear to have been unaware of the new relationship or the announcement. It was not carried in the official government media account of the press conference and it is unclear if the announcement was planned or impromptu. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca announced formal diplomatic relations with Iran would "start today" during a September 11 press conference. The focus of the press conference was new, stricter visa requirements for U.S. citizens (septel) and the announcement of formal diplomatic relations was added at the end. Choquehuanca added he hoped the decision "would not be misinterpreted by other countries." Choquehuanca explained, "We are establishing this relationship because Iran likes and supports Bolivia." He said it is important that Bolivia "establish relations with countries that want to help raise Bolivians out of poverty." Responding to a question about increased commercial ties with Iran, Choquehuanca said Bolivia needs to concentrate on exports and any country that wanted to invest in Bolivia would be "welcome." (Note: While in Teheran for a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement last week, Choquehuanca apparently signed an agreement to establish relations. He was also quoted as defending Iran's nuclear program. End Note.)

¶3. (C) Although foreshadowed by warm comments about Bolivian-Iranian relations and imprecise mentions of

improving relations from Choquehuanca and President Evo Morales last week (reftel), neither had mentioned specifics or a timeline concerning formal diplomatic relations. Iranian Ambassador to Venezuela Abdulat Zifan (alternative "Zisan") concluded an agreement to establish milk processing factories in Bolivian with Iranian help and equipment September 5, where Morales voiced intentions to increase economic cooperation and spoke vaguely about starting down the road to formal relations in the future, but stopped shy of announcing concrete plans to do so. Choquehuanca making the announcement on the tail end of a press conference about new visa requirements seemed clumsy. Iranian relations are not mentioned in the official Bolivian government press release and it is unclear if Choquehuanca planned the announcement or slipped it in impromptu at the end of the press conference.

14. (C) Senator Tito Hoz de Vila (from the opposition Podemos party) told Ambassador Goldberg on September 11 that he had been told by a government-MAS party congressman that Morales' inner circle views Iran as a substitute for Libya now that Libya has improved relations with the U.S. and Europe. Hoz de Vila explained that many in Evo's inner circle received training in and had traveled to Libya, but that Iran now fills the role Libya used to play as a voice against the United States and the West.

15. (C) Bolivian Director of Multilateral Affairs Ruben Vidaurre told poloff September 11 that career rank and file Foreign Ministry officers were caught unaware of the announcement, learning about it via the media. He said he was only aware of a memorandum of intent to improve relations

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signed by Choquehuanca during his trip last week in Tehran on the margins of a meeting of the Non-Aligned States. He added that it was not unusual or inappropriate that he would not know about the announcement, as it was outside his purview, but implied that he would have been informed of such a significant announcement in prior administrations.
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